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Soviet espionage siphon[illegible] U.S. know-how

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Washington—As a target for espionage, William Holden Bell was textbook perfect.

Then 59 years old and trying to keep pace with a new wife 25 years his junior, he was bitter about a relatively unrewarding career and desperately in need of cash to support a life-style of travel and leisure.

In short, Bell, a radar technology expert for Hughes Aircraft Company, a major U.S. defense contractor, was ripe for the picking. And picked he was.

Before the FBI caught up with him last summer, Bell, in exchange for about $110,000, handed over to Polish government agents classified information regarding some of the West's most closely guarded weapons systems, including the Stealth bomber and several others designed to offset the Warsaw Pact's numerical superiority in Europe.

The Bell case is the stuff of spy drama in an era in which mercenary interests have come to outweigh the political motivations of earlier times. Today, espionage coups can be scored through acquisition of the technology that goes into a child's electronic baseball game, and dummy corporations play as great a role as do secret letter drops and midnight rendezvous.

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More significant, the case illustrates what law enforcement officials in the United States—including Attorney General William French Smith and FBI Director William H. Webster—see as a change in tactics by the Soviets in a concerted effort to obtain data about American advances in military and industrial technology.

While espionage in the United States certainly is nothing new for the Soviets, the law enforcement officials see the Kremlin turning more than ever to clandestine means of gaining scientific hardware and know-how, since bans on over the invasion of Afghanistan. Last month, President Reagan sought to toughen the embargo following the military crackdown in Poland, which he has said was inspired by the Kremlin.

The Reagan administration's action, federal law enforcement officials believe, is likely to spur the KGB and the GRU, the two Soviet intelligence agencies operating in this country, to ever-greater efforts to obtain secretly and illegally what Moscow once might have acquired openly.

Some experts, but by no means all, see the acquisition of outside technology as vital to Moscow's hopes of continuing its military competition with the United States and at the same time addressing its own internal economic problems.

If they were not able to utilize Western know-how as a sort of "quick fix," some of these experts believe, the Soviets would confront a continuing series of difficult trade-offs, particularly in allocating precious research and development resources, in trying to meet both their defense and domestic needs.

The West "is virtually subsidizing Soviet military power," says Dr. Miles Costick, who runs the Washington-based Institute for Strategic Trade and occasionally serves as a congressional consultant on East-West trade.

There are some, including a few members of Congress, who believe the extent to which the Kremlin relies on Western technology is greatly exaggerated by a Reagan administration that tends to view most foreign policy questions in East-West terms. This would seem to be a minority view, however.

Representative Jonathan B. Bingham (D, N.Y.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee that oversees U.S. trade policy, asserts flatly that the Reagan administration has overstated the seriousness of the problem to the United States, particularly the contribution the West has made to the Soviets through over-the-counter sales of know-how.

Others, including some top policy-makers in the executive branch, question Washington's ability to choke off such exports, even if such a goal is warranted.

"There is no doubt that Western technology has had some impact," says William A. Root, director of the Office of East-West Trade at the State Department, but "if you take the line that any trade frees resources for military production, that basically is a formula for a total embargo, and this is